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HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS: HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATIONS AND REPORTS OF SPECIAL RAPPORTEURS AND REPRESENTATIVES

Letter dated 30 December 1993 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions from my Government and with reference to paragraphs 48, 49 and 124 of document A/48/584 entitled "Situation of human rights in Afghanistan", I have the honour to state the following.

1. Providing appropriate durable solutions to the problems of refugees has been recognized by the United Nations as an international responsibility. The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees calls, inter alia, for international cooperation in order to solve the problems resulting from the unduly heavy burdens of those countries which grant asylum to refugees. Many resolutions adopted by the General Assembly and the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) emphasize, inter alia, the need to share, to the maximum possible extent by means of international assistance, the burden of those States which continue to admit large numbers of refugees.

2. During the past 14 years, the Islamic Republic of Iran has admitted over 4 million Afghan and Iraqi refugees and has persevered to allocate from its own national resources considerable funds to meet their needs. As stipulated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in her statement before the forty-fourth session of the Executive Committee and reflected in document A/48/12/Add.1 of 19 October 1993: "Indeed, the Islamic Republic of Iran has the largest refugee population in the world today." Yet, as in the past, international assistance still is minimal, as well as disproportionate to the volume of refugees.

3. The ways in which the Islamic Republic of Iran has treated the millions of refugees have been characterized as meeting the highest standards. The documents of the Executive Committee regarding Iran issued during the past

decade, specifically those prepared by the related regional department in the Office of UNHCR, reliably support that characterization. Furthermore, the current session of the General Assembly, in its resolution 48/116, commends those States such as Iran that, despite severe economic and development challenges of their own, admit millions of refugees.

4. The spontaneous repatriation of Afghan refugees that began in early 1992 has become regulated under programmes of the Tripartite Commission composed of the Islamic State of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and UNHCR. This Commission provides an effective framework for supervision of the voluntary return of the Afghan refugees, as well as settlement of probable difficulties that naturally arise in such a large-scale and long-term operation. The operation has been and is being carried out under direct and close international supervision through the presence and participation of concerned bodies including UNHCR, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), as well as various non-governmental organizations. Last September, UNHCR monitored the operation in various parts of Iran, including Khorasan Province. In the High Commissioner's remarks concerning her observations, she lauded the Iranian people and Government for the hospitable attitude they have adopted and continued towards the Afghan refugees in the past 14 years and expressed her satisfaction over their voluntary return to Afghanistan. She also reiterated her Office's support for continuation of the operation.

5. As repeatedly emphasized by the Iranian delegations and the High Commissioner herself, lack of appropriate socio-economic infrastructures and security in Afghanistan constitute a major obstacle to the repatriation process. The direct correlation between improvement of living conditions in Afghanistan and an increase in the voluntary return of refugees should be properly addressed by the international community. If not, even after an ideal voluntary repatriation, the main concern of the refugee problem, that is, reintegration, will persist and continue to endanger a full settlement of the situation.

6. Respect for and protection of all refugees, including Afghans, constitute the essence of Iran's treatment of them. Voluntary, dignified and safe repatriation of all refugees has been repeatedly encouraged by high-level Iranian officials. Based on this policy, all legal requirements have been enacted and updated to facilitate better protection of those refugees in the repatriation process and those who continue to reside in the Islamic Republic of Iran, until conditions permit them to return to their homelands with safety and dignity.

It would be highly appreciated if the present letter were circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 114 (c) and brought to the attention of the Commission on Human Rights.

(Signed) Gholamali KHOSHROO
Ambassador
Deputy Permanent Representative